New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1952

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1952 PRODUCTIONS

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"Jane"

The New York Times

February 2, 1952

S. N. Behrman's 'Jane,' Put on by the Guild With Edna Best and Basil Rathbone

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Add S. N. Behrman to Somerset Maugham and the result is bound to be distinguished. It is, in fact, "Jane," which was extremely well acted at the Coronet last evening with Edna Best and Basil Rathbone in the leading parts. According to the program, "Jane" has "been suggested" by an original story by that eminent old party, W. Somerset Maugham, whose "The Constant Wife" is keeping Katharine Cornell steadily employed all this season. Mr. Behrman, a meticulous workman, has been writing and rewriting "Jane" for quite a long time.

* * *

If you want to be absolutely meticulous about criticism, he has not finished it perfectly yet. For the first act is the most brilliant; there are spots later on when the workmanship is a little labored and a little verbose. But that will complete this morning's animadversions on a civilized comedy that has been written with wit, grace, taste and intelligence by a man who knows the language and uses it without exploiting it. Add to the virtues of "Jane" the pleasure of hearing the English language. For a quarter of a century, Mr. Behrman has been our most immaculate writer of the comedy of manners. He has not been in such good form for years.

* * *

Plucked out of Maugham, "Jane" is populated with English worldlings rich enough to afford the luxury of despising each other. Jane, who comes from Liverpool, becomes a fad in London because she speaks the truth. Accustomed to fashionable small talk, the other people in the comedy are astonished and entertained by her artless habit of saying what she thinks.

There is a story of sorts about the pure younger generation baffling its elders, and there is a pleasant moral lesson about being good and unselfish. No doubt Mr. Behrman and Mr. Maugham believe it, and it does them credit. Since "Jane" is a drawing-room comedy you are likely to take more delight in the style of the writing than the drawing of character.

* * *

Some of the characters probably derive from recognizable people in English social life. On account of the laws of libel it would be reckless to attempt to name them. But one of the most fascinating characters is a weary, skeptical writer of stories and comedies known familiarly as "Willie" and obviously intended as a sketch of Willie Somerset Maugham.

This is one of Mr. Behrman's happiest inventions. The observations are wise. The words are precisely chosen, and they draw blood with rapier dexterity. There is even a little criticism of Mr. Maugham's limitations as an observer of human life. If there were nothing else in "Jane," this amiable and perceptive portrait of a talented professional writer would be something worth cherishing on its own merits.

Fortunately, the performance and the production are superb in the best tradition of the Theatre Guild. Elfi Von Kantzow has designed an elaborate, expensive, slightly decadent drawing-room where clever things can be said with wicked reassurance. The costumes are smart. Valentina, a master hand at this sort of thing, has dressed Miss Best in grandeur becoming her station.

Cyril Ritchard's direction is perfect—relaxed on the surface but crackling inside. As Jane, whose social gaucheries are so wholesome, Miss Best is wonderful. Without abandoning the simplicity of the part she is comic and forceful. Mr. Rathbone's writer is one of his top performances. Although Willie's tongue is malicious, he enjoys the life he is drifting through and his instincts are generous. Since Mr. Rathbone is a careful workman he speaks his lines adroitly.

* * *

Irene Brown's rushing, harried, dissembling divorcee, and Howard St. John's vulgar, dissipated but intellectually alert newspaper tycoon are unhackneyed character portraits designed by able craftsmen. In the less grateful part of a social cad, Philip Friend gives an admirably resolved performance. And Adrienne Corri and William Whitman are fresh and attractive as the unsullied younger generation.

Matching Mr. Behrman and Mr. Maugham has been an inspiration. "Jane" is a thorough delight as literature and acting. In the field of comic theatre nothing so skillful as this has turned up all season.

"JANE"

Comedy by S. N. Behrman, based on a story by W. Somerset Maugham; staged by Cyril Ritchard; setting by Elfi von Kantzow; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Coronet Theatre, February 1, 1952. The cast:

Ann Tower.....Adrienne Corri
Peter Crewe..William Whitman
Wilson.....Al Collins
William Tower..Basil Rathbone
Millicent Tower..Irene Browne
Jane Fowler.....Edna Best
Maid.....Sarah Marshall
Lord Frobisher.....
Howard St. John
Gilbert Dabney...Philip Friend

New York Post

February 3, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Strange Case of Mr. Behrman

There is no American dramatist who writes such consistently graceful and urbane prose as S. N. Behrman. Possessing a civilized, tolerant and ironical mind and a gift for witty and epigrammatic turn of phrase, he gives us comedies that almost invariably offer a quality of style, individuality and freshness of approach too seldom found in the contemporary theater. But, unfortunately, there is a penalty that often goes with these rare and commendable virtues. It comes out in a curious lack of dramatic vitality and a weakness of plot structure that seem almost to indicate a lack of interest on the part of the playwright.

All of these characteristic traits, good and bad, are to be found in "Jane," Mr. Behrman's dramatization of a Somerset Maugham story, which the Theater Guild presented at the Coronet Friday night, and the result seems to me singularly disturbing. There is so much that is bright, witty and charming in this comedy about the middle-aged Liverpool frump who becomes the belle of pre-war London that its failure to be more continuously interesting and alive is a particularly upsetting experience in a melancholy season to an observer who finds the author one of the distinctive talents of the American theater.

Resisting Drama

One of the characters in "Jane" is a successful English writer and, at one point, Mr. Behrman says of him that, being a dramatist, he can't resist a dramatic situation. I only wish the same thing could be written of S. N. Behrman, but I am afraid that, if ever a playwright could not only resist such a situation but refuse almost perversely to take advantage of it, he is the man. The wit, the humor and the urbanity are there, and so is the gift for fresh and unhackneyed characterization, but, when it comes to making something dramatically satisfying out of a serviceable plot, the spirit is oddly missing.

Indeed, it is only in the third act that "Jane" really comes to life as a play, and, by this time, it is too late. It isn't a very sturdy story at best, this sly and bemused tale of the middle-aged lady with the young husband, who has a frankness and candor in her approach to society that makes her sought after by the successful writer and a wealthy newspaper publisher. But, considering the wit and dexterity of Mr. Behrman's prose style, it should certainly be enough to serve as the framework of a steadily diverting comedy. But, while there are delightful things in "Jane," there are a lot of dull spaces, too.

Drawn from Life

Despite these stretches, the play is, in general, far from a bore to one who relishes the frequent flashes of the Behrman wit and the wry Behrman gift for being at once malicious and sympathetic toward his characters. The playwright isn't averse to using people he knows as the basis for the people in his plays, and it is giving away no secret to say that the writer bears certain resemblances to Mr. Maugham and the publisher has a number of traits in common with the eminent Lord Beaverbrook. I should think both of these gentlemen should be pleased with the likenesses, because they come out quite engagingly in the theater.

Edna Best, an actress with a genuine sense of character, plays Jane with skill and astuteness, but the most entertaining performance of the evening is contributed by the skillful Howard St. John, who succeeds in being both fatuous and most engaging as the publisher. It is a well-written character, and Mr. St. John handles the part deftly. Basil Rathbone struck me as a trifle heavy as the writer until the last act, wherein he is in excellent form. Irene Browne as Jane's disapproving sister-in-law and Philip Friend as the young husband have less attractive parts, which they manage well. I wish all of "Jane" were like its last act.

Daily Mirror

February 2, 1952

'Jane' Is Behrman At His Silky, Amusing Best

By ROBERT COLEMAN

High comedy has almost vanished from the American theatre, which for the past few seasons has been so busy with problems and depressing people that it has almost forgotten how to induce laughter. One of our few playwrights still master of the sophisticated chuckle is S. N. Behrman.

Behrman switched off the track for a while, but is now, thank goodness, back on the main line again with "Jane," a delightful comedy which the Theatre Guild installed last evening in the Coronet. He owes, in this instance, his inspiration to an original story by W. Somerset Maugham, himself no mean hand at drawing-room dramaturgy. As witness "The Constant Wife."

"Jane" is an incredible play. We didn't believe a bit of it. But we didn't care. We were kept so busy laughing at its ingenious artifices and savoring its sparkling dialogue that reality seemed of no importance. In our opinion, Behrman has never penned more silky, amusing, and keenly observant wordage.

"Jane" has to do with a dowdy, middle-aged wealthy widow from Liverpool who startles her smart London relations by marrying an impecunious architect 20 years her junior. The ambitious, calculating young artist transforms her into an attractive woman, a la Shaw's "Pygmalion." She becomes a reigning celebrity because of her disarming honesty and very lack of brilliance.

But the social pace soon palls, and Jane yearns for the comforts of placid domesticity. She releases the architect so that he may realize his ambitions, and reforms a brash, restless amorous newspaper tycoon into the pattern she really wants for a husband. Having had an exciting fling, tranquility seems most desirable to her.

Edna Best manages Jane's transformation from Victorian dullness through the butterfly stage to final maturity beautifully. Basil Rathbone and Irene Browne are perfect as her brittle, worldly relatives. Howard St. John is quite wonderful as the self-made, willful baron of the press. And Philip Friend is eminently right as the architect.

Adrienne Corri and William Whitman do well by the romantics in a sub-plot.

Cyril Ritchard has staged "Jane" with fine style. His pacing and timing are most effective, displaying Behrman's polished lines to advantage.

If you want to laugh, forget that income tax day is just around the corner and escape for a couple of hours into a circle of diverting conversationalists, a visit to the Coronet is imperative. You'll have fun at the hilarious hit. We did.

Journal American

February 2, 1952

Best's Skillful Acting Fails to Save Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

Somerset Maugham is a masterful hand with the short story, but to transpose one of his charming anecdotes of morals and manners into a successful play in three acts is enough to challenge the talents of—well, of S. N. Behrman, who made just such an attempt with something called "Jane" which Theatre Guild presented at the Coronet Theatre last night.

I do not think he got away with it, despite a distinguished performance by Edna Best.

There are many moments of the fluid and brittle humor which Behrman can generate on his own, there are parts of scenes which would fit flawlessly and compellingly into a more cohesive whole, but there are not enough of these to add up to an entirely satisfactory evening.

Only Maugham's original characters remain in what came across the boards of the Coronet Theatre last night, and I'm sure if Behrman had not been haunted by the original plot he would have done better on his own.

• • •

As it emerges, it is the tale of a dowdy old widow from Liverpool who marries a too young and handsome decorator, moves to London and becomes the social success of the hour.

Having achieved this new stature she solves a difficult problem of matrimony in the household of her former sister-in-law, casts aside her young spouse and winds up, herself, in love with a powerful and eligible publisher of her own vintage.

This is a far cry, basically, from the Maugham story. And the cry is neither sufficiently melodic or loud or comical to carry that far.

Miss Best proceeds through the entire auspices with the big pack on her back. She is obviously the widow, "Jane," and she performs with candor and ingenuity and infinite skill.

On the other hand I think she gets something less than consummate support from Basil Rathbone, the other star, who had a bad evening with his lines. After a fluff one is apt to become nervous and this is not designed to aid the subsequent performance.

Irene Browne was a tower of strength as Rathbone's ex-wife and Howard St. John made a good role better as Lord Probisher, the publisher.

Philip Friend contributed his great good looks and a relaxed ability to act to the part of Miss Best's decorator and I liked Adrienne Corri and William Whitman as the young lovers.

But I can't say I really liked the show.

New York Herald Tribune

February 2, 1952

'Jane'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE prospect of a play by S. N. Behrman out of an anecdote by Somerset Maugham promises a good bit in the way of epigrammatic wit, sly style, and genial urbanity. "Jane," which was presented by the Theatre Guild at the Coronet last night, has all of these things. It also has Basil Rathbone to pronounce the bon mots impeccably, and Edna Best to lend grace and warm humor to its leading role.

But it is, after an agreeably funny first act, woefully thin on invention. Miss Best plays a quaint little frump from Liverpool who descends on her London relatives with the startling announcement that she is about to marry "her young man." The man in question turns out to be young indeed—a handsome, penniless architect half her age—and the family quickly set about dissuading Jane from the unlikely match.

Jane, however, is no mooning middle-aged victim of a fortune hunter. She is a happy realist, perfectly aware that she is not in love with her youngster but inclined to think that marriage would be nice for a change. She indulges herself in no sentimental nonsense, speaks her mind simply and clearly, and has the effect, as one of the characters says, of being an extraordinary combination of the oracle of Delphi and Dale Carnegie.

So long as Edna Best is confronting her conventional in-laws with a preposterously placid common sense, she is enchanting. Bundled up in north country tweeds and an old wool sweater, but speaking with an alarming candor, she makes the Behrman-Maugham conceit seem a happy inspiration.

• • •

In the second act we discover that her dashing young husband has decked her out in the height of London fashion, and that her unfamiliar directness has swept the town. And here, I think, is where the play begins to lose spirit. The notion that a jolly old girl who has arrived looking like Queen Victoria can suddenly emerge as the belle of the season is a promising one. But the situation is never exploited. By the time we see Jane again—and Miss Best is dazzling in her reincarnation—she herself has wearied of the game. She confesses to being simply, and flatly, tired. She is wrangling snappishly with her husband. Her forthrightness has already damaged his career. The Cinderella-like promise that has been held out to us is quickly and curiously deflated, the bubbling high-comedy tone of the first act begins to tangle with a captious

"Jane"—*continued*

and carping realism, and some charming people suddenly find themselves engaged in a rather dreary, and quite aimless, reshuffling of mates.

* * *

The play recovers ground somewhat in its last act, especially when a wary publisher who realizes that he is next on Jane's matrimonial list thrashes about in his attempts to stave off the moment of capitulation. Howard St. John plays the elderly roue who astounds himself by falling in love with Jane, and he extracts from the scene every ounce of outraged humor that is in it. But the play stubbornly refuses to come into focus, and Mr. Behrman's frequently stunning lines are left dangling in mid-air.

Basil Rathbone plays a Maugham-like commentator on the action, and his crisp, sardonic elegance is exactly right for the polished and pungent cynicism which marks "Jane" at its best. Irene Browne is perhaps overly mannered as a managing matron, but she earns her fair share of the evening's laughs. If "Jane" had any clear sense of where it was going from laugh to laugh, it might have made a captivating comedy of manners.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 2, 1952

'Jane' a Hilarious Cinderella Tale

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Edna Best is playing a grown-up version of Cinderella in "Jane," and doing it with characteristic calm and warmth and her inimitable, deceptive look of making no effort about anything.

The new comedy is of the school of "The Constant Wife," which Maugham wrote, as he did the original story of "Jane." It is prewar in setting, and prewar in mood and technique. Which means that it is leisurely, pleasantly contrived and often studded with the most agreeable sort of laugh-provoking lines. One, in fact, sets off a detonation of outrageous hilarity.

The humorous sessions have to outbalance some pretty talky sequences, but it seems to me they more than make the whole evening worthwhile.

Dowdy Relative.

Miss Best is a dowdy relative of a friendly divorced couple, clearly intended as Maugham and his wife. In the course of the story, this sister-in-law shocks everyone by marrying a very young and handsome husband, learning to dress fashionably and becoming the pride of London society through her remarkable frankness.

How she manages to level off her life after this unusual adventure, and gets the man she really wants, is the substance of the narrative.

Since certain lines call for Miss Best's character to suggest Queen Victoria at the beginning, her remarkable get-up is justified, extreme as it appears. It is pleasant to watch her strolling around later as a comfortably mature fairy princess in white train and tiara.

Rathbone Co-Stars.

Her gentle, somewhat studious way of ripping off devastating remarks has the happiest sort of effect on the play.

Basil Rathbone is co-starred and plays what might have been a comparatively negative part in the goings-on. Even though he seemed nervous at the outset last night, he has the stature always to demand attention on the stage and to give importance to the slightest matter he says.

Howard St. John is a joy as the roisterer who finds his knack for indulgences destroyed by Jane's interest. It is a bold, straightforward, witty performance.

Zany Goings-On.

Irene Browne plays with just the sort of brittle artifice this kind of play needs, and offers perfect contrast to Edna Best. Miss Browne's performance is as gleefully unreal as the business where she waters a five-foot tree and two bowls of flowers from a three-ounce watering can.

Philip Friend is attractive and eager as the young husband. The only question I could raise with Cyril Ritchard's canny direction is allowing Friend to turn so bad mannered toward his wife in the end.

If the biggest proportion of laughs comes in the final act, that is the direction in which a comedy certainly ought to move. Anybody who is entertained with the thought that people old enough to have grown children can still be pretty romantic themselves, is likely to find himself vastly amused by Jane and the revolutions in her life.

DAILY NEWS

February 2, 1952

Behrman's 'Jane' a Bright, Shiny New Comedy, Engagingly Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is nothing like a bright and shiny new drawing-room comedy, intelligently written and engagingly acted, for adding seasoning to a theatrical season. Now we have it in S. N. Behrman's "Jane," which the Theatre Guild presented at the Coronet last evening. You may safely add it to your playgoing list.

A drawing-room comedy should not be about very much, so this one isn't. Behrman has taken a Somerset Maugham short story and spun it into a light, shimmering stage piece about a woman who becomes quite a character among the fashionables of London because she thinks clearly and speaks truthfully. The Behrman wit is dry and therefore "Jane" is the kind of comedy which invokes chuckles—and it must be said for chuckles that they are much less wearing than guffaws or belly-laughs. But, just to show he can do it, Behrman does manage to provide for a couple of hearty howls.

Dowdy But Charming.

We've had a run of plays about females with one name—"Gigi," "Nina," "Gertie"—and I am particularly fond of Jane as she is played by Edna Best. Miss Best is simply a darling in the role of a dowdy but wealthy widow who comes from Liverpool to London to marry a young man. "I advertised for him," she explains to her astonished sister-in-law; but it develops that she advertised for an architect, not a husband.

Another character involved is Basil Rathbone, divorced husband of Jane's sister-in-law. He is called Willie, and he seems to be W. Somerset Maugham in person—a novelist of elegance and wit who travels incessantly. Then there is Howard St. John as Lord Frobisher—a crude and forceful newspaper baron who might be a Beaverbrook or Harmsworth. Also present is Philip Friend as the young architect; Adrienne Corri—the young redhead who was first seen here in the movie, "The River"—and William Whitman are on hand to offer their youthful passion as a contrast to the more practical love-making of the middle-aged.

They make a very pleasant company, and they have been very deftly guided about the stage by their director, Cyril Ritchard. Miss Best and Mr. Rathbone get the stars' share of the fun as well as the billing, but St. John and Irene Browne, as the sister-in-law, are a great help in making everything smart and cheerful at the Coronet. Even the setting, by Elfi von Kantzow, is smart and cheerful.

"Gertie"

New York World-Telegram
and
The ~~Evening~~ Sun

January 31, 1952

'Gertie' Takes Magic In Her Stride

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is the realist who takes care of the romanticist in "Gertie," the new play of Enid Bagnold's, which stars Glynis Johns at the Plymouth.

If this is a modern Cinderella story, insofar as opportunity comes by magic, it carries a further moral in its sensitive insistence that advantage must be taken of the opportunity in a cool and determined manner.

In her brilliant novels, Miss Bagnold has frequently made the most of unlikely material or all but unbelievable situations. If she is not so successful here, it is largely because "Gertie" is nowhere near as dramatic an idea as was "Serena Blandish" or "National Velvet" or "The Loved and Envied."

Characters Concealed.

Nor is the presentation of the narrative clear and direct for stage purposes. Too often the identity, purpose and relation of characters is concealed far too long after they have come on the stage and plunged into the dramatic activity. You clutch at clues and memorize them like discards in a rummy game.

Gertie and her father, brother and sister are nearing the finish of an inheritance from their English mother. The wife of an American publisher comes to inquire about the father's new lengthy treatise.

It developes in an unlikely manner that the woman is also a story scout for a moving picture company, desperately hunting for a vehicle for two Italian actors. Gertie's sister has written just such a play.

Lightning strikes twice since the visitor has brought with her a Broadway producer, her former husband, and coincidentally an old friend of the same two sisters, who wants a play for them.

Road to Romance.

Gertie is determined to make her way up in the world via the producer, and will guide her unwilling sister to success, fame and romance.

It is a pity that the unfolding of the story is so often indirect, and that Miss Bagnold has counted so on coincidences. Her people are revealed with maturity and insight, sensitivity and delicacy. But her story never grips the audience.

Glynis Johns, a familiar picture figure from England, plays with warmth and youthful bluntness which is very winning as the very young and very wise Gertie.

"GERTIE"

Play by Enid Bagnold; staged by Herman Shumlin; setting by William and Jean Eckart; costumes by Hazel Roy; presented by Mr. Shumlin at the Plymouth Theatre, January 30, 1952. The cast:

Bianca.....Anita Cooper
James.....Robert Duke
Gertie.....Glynis Johns
Sarah.....Patricia Wheel
Mr. Ritchie.....Alan Napier
Mrs. Candida Kaufman.....
Polly Rowles
Rex.....Albert Dekker

Splendid Cast.

I very much liked Patricia Wheel as the hypersensitive young author, and Robert Duke as a complacent and masculinely casual brother. Polly Rowles neatly establishes a brittle figure of a successful businesswoman, whose relation with her unseen husband is the most interesting story suggested in the play.

Albert Dekker is straightforward as the object of Gertie's calculations, and Alan Napier is honestly concentrated in his work as the father of the family.

NEW YORK
Herald ~~Tribune~~ Tribune

January 31, 1952

'Gertie'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN "GERTIE," which Herman Shumlin brought to the Plymouth Wednesday night, Glynis Johns plays a quiet little lass who, for all her languid eyes and demure manner, knows her own mind. At night, before she goes to bed, she reckons up her ambitions one by one, and when she does get a chance to escape from her drowsy home on the English countryside to the somewhat wickeder life of the great wide world, she seizes it with a discreet little fist. She is cool, calculating, and confident. She has, as she says, the "shine of certainty" about her.

It is too bad that the rest of Enid Bagnold's play does not have the drive, and the clear-headed purpose, of its principal character. Miss Bagnold writes well. She has created some pleasant and quite freshly drawn people. She has set them in an agreeable background. And she has given them some genuinely amusing things to say from time to time.

* * *

But, with the exception of Gertie herself, she has given them no place to go. The musty, placid, lackadaisical atmosphere from which Gertie wishes to take flight is the atmosphere of the play. For three acts we are exposed to the extremely casual conversation of a number of aimless people: Gertie's ineffectual father, her complacent brother, her wistful and love-starved sister. When a female motion-picture executive, together with an ex-husband who looks a likely answer to Gertie's prayer, come into the play they come for no very urgent reason. The piece continues to idle along at what is now thought of as a characteristically English clip, and when one of the visitors complains of being sleepy after a Sunday dinner of boiled beef and dumplings, you are inclined to share his lassitude, if not his satisfaction.

* * *

There are, it is true, several pungently funny scenes as the straightforward Gertie puts her cards on the table before a bewildered, but interested, male. And Glynis Johns plays them delightfully. She propositions her man with a permanent pout and a husky drawl, and the easy feline grace she brings to her best scenes makes for some captivating underplaying.

To get the maximum effect from Miss Johns' relaxed technique, though, the rest of the play should go spinning about her, providing her with some sort of contrast. Instead the balance of the company, under Mr. Shumlin's direction, play at precisely the same leisurely rate, and the evening flattens out in the process.

This is no doubt partly due to the fact that the author is essentially a novelist, and is content to work for mood and quality rather than that special, unflagging tension which the stage demands. She has, for instance, failed to provide a single emphatic curtain. But Mr. Shumlin must be held to account, too, for allowing the play to lounge so visibly around the living room.

Albert Dekker plays the object of Gertie's maneuverings with a gentle Brooks Brothers charm, but he never does suggest the ruthlessness attributed to him by the other characters. Polly Rowles does handsomely by the film executive, managing her mink, her jewels, her cigarette holder and her lines with equal elegance. Patricia Wheel is appealing as Gertie's lovelorn sister, though there is rather more artifice than warmth in her playing.

Miss Johns is a decidedly attractive girl, and her vehicle has some wit and some genuine discernment. But it is almost entirely without theatrical vigor.

New York Post

January 31, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

An English Play Entitled 'Gertie'

Enid Bagnold's "Gertie" is, I suppose, the author's idea of a sophisticated Cinderella story. There aren't any wicked stepsisters, but there is the girl drudge of the family, and she finally goes off to America with the Prince, who, in this case, is an opulent Broadway theatrical producer.

The new English comedy featuring the courtship, if one may venture to call it that, was presented amid quite a lot of words at the Plymouth Theater last night, but, despite the valiant efforts of Glynis Johns and her associates, the result was far from happy.

Miss Johns, as you must have heard, is the young English actress of stage and screen who is making her American debut in the title role of Miss Bagnold's play. These are times wherein attractive young women have been known to save comedies from dismal fates, and Miss Johns plays with charm and guile in her efforts to salvage the luckless proceedings. But I am afraid that the handicaps are somewhat too much for her, and, for all her engaging valor, it is to be feared that even she grows a bit monotonous before the evening is over.

Visiting Americans

In "Gertie," the playwright is describing the impact on an impecunious English family of two visiting Americans, a wealthy lady who is scouting material for Hollywood and her ex-husband, who is following her in the hope of rescuing something for Broadway. The British father and the two older children are dreamy and impractical, but Gertie is a realistic young woman, who realizes that her one important talent is sex appeal, and she is convinced that New York is the proper field for her endeavors. Miss Bagnold thinks so, too.

Not being a sentimental dramatist, Miss Bagnold never allows her heroine to go in for any romantic illusions, and at least it may be said for "Gertie" that it is a remarkably disillusioned Cinderella tale. But the girl does have an admirable family loyalty, and she succeeds not only in starting off for New York with her rich man but also in selling her literary sister's play for a Broadway production. There is, I suspect, a touch of novelty in the idea of showing a young woman who gives in to a stage producer to further her sister's ambitions.

One Scene

There is at least one scene that has a certain amount of humor and imagination. This is when Gertie lures her sister into telling the plot of her play by insisting to the producer that its events had actually taken place, and Patricia Wheel, who portrays the older girl, manages the episode with much skill. But, even here, the scene lasts too long and finally drifts off into tedium. That is chiefly what is wrong with the new comedy. Even when it does show signs of becoming entertaining, it falls back into flatness and ineffectuality.

It is worth repeating that Miss Johns is an attractive and talented actress, who would be decidedly worth watching under happier circumstances. Miss Wheel, too, deserves better things, and Polly Rowles achieves the feat of extracting some humor from the role of the talent scout for the films. Albert Dekker plays the producer, and, if he doesn't make him the most fascinating fellow in the world, neither does the author. Alan Napier at least manages to look a little like an English James Thurber as the impractical father. None of them can make "Gertie" more than an adventure in tedium.

Journal-American

January 31, 1952

Glynis Gives the Play Warmth and Humor

By JOHN McCLAIN

There was a time about midway through the first act of "Gertie," which opened at the Plymouth Theatre last night, when I believe most of the congregation was undecided whether to remain and be bored stiff or rush out into the night and be frozen likewise.

The proceedings opened slowly and stumbled around in a humorless fashion and even the awaited appearance of Glynis Johns, pert and decorative as she proved to be, didn't seem to provide the necessary injection.

But then, quite suddenly, the whole thing came incredibly to life. There was logic and delightful humor in the effortless performance Miss Johns was giving, and as her character developed, so did the quality of her lines.

I don't say Enid Bagnold's play that quickly emerged from the doldrums or that it ever became any great shakes as a vehicle.

But there is no gainsaying the fact that once little Miss Johns got her teeth firmly sunk into the script she swept the audience along with the sheer power of her talents until, at the final curtain, there seemed little doubt she will be one of the more luminous stars of the season and that because of this "Gertie" will do successful business.

• • •

Lo, the Americans

The play which Herman Shumlin produced and directed for Miss Bagnold concerns a vague British scientist and his three children. Miss Johns and her older brother and sister.

The old man is running out of the slight capital left when the mother died, but he is too busy living on a pink cloud and writing a treatise on "Crystals and Magnetics" to give their plight any practical attention.

Miss Johns, the only realist in the family, becomes aware that the situation can be saved only through the employment of her obvious assets—beauty and confidence and a naive though unimpressionable attitude toward men.

Into this household come the inevitable rich Americans, Polly Rowles, a high-powered female executive of Lion Pictures, and Albert Dekker, a Broadway producer.

Of course, Miss Johns sees in the producer an excursion ticket to the gilded world beyond the horizon, and in her efforts to drive a financial bargain with him she also arouses his interest in a play her sister happens to have written.

As we leave them, several thousand words later, Miss Johns is coming to America as a protege of Mr. Dekker, who also is going to produce her sister's play. The lady executive is flying home to a sick husband. The scientist father is still working on his crystals and the son is staying in England to look after him.

It would be interesting to know how all this works out, but it would require an enormous amount of additional scenery.

She Makes the Play

It is neither a particularly strong or original drama but when Miss Johns breathes into it, as she does most of the time, it has its heights of comedy and warmth.

Polly Rowles performs with great credibility as the American career woman, serving as a tireless pawn for Miss Johns' incisive comments on life and love. Albert Dekker is agreeably forthright and engaging as the producer.

Alan Napier, the father, was required to remain unbelievably vacuous and detached throughout, a chore he performed to the best advantage of the text, and Patricia Wheel and Robert Duke made strenuous efforts with the roles of the brother and sister, neither of which seemed clearly delineated to me.

Shumlin directed with extreme mobility — Miss Johns must have covered a mile in the course of the evening—and the setting by William and Jean Eckart was sufficiently stark and country British to highlight the action.

This is Glynis Johns' first appearance on the stage in America and she is to be congratulated for rising above a pedestrian play. If she brought a return ticket to England she'd better turn it in.

Daily Mirror

January 31, 1952

'Gertie' at the Plymouth; It's Tepid, Intricate

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Herman Shumlin has tried to hit the jackpot with English plays three times this season, to no avail. He made the third attempt last evening at the Plymouth Theatre with Enid Bagnold's "Gertie." The only newsworthy note about the new arrival is that it introduces to New York Glynis Johns, voted England's No. 1 film star.

"Gertie," paradoxically, is both frail and complicated. It is a short and tepid script notable for the intricacies of its plot. This has to do with a powerful American film executive—a woman—who visits an English scientist at his home in the country on behalf of her publisher husband. The scientist is completing a learned book on crystals and the relationship between magnetism and gravity.

The improvident scholar has three children: a son with prospects and two daughters without. The youngest, however, is ambitious and shrewd. She is determined to repair the family fortunes through her looks. And she succeeds in doing so by using her wiles on a play producer who happens to be the former husband of the mighty movie gal.

Both producer and Hollywood exec are after a script that will lure a brother team of Italian actors to Manhattan or the Coast. Conveniently enough, the older sister has penned just such a script. There's quite a lot more plot, but you'll have to visit the Plymouth if you want to follow it. For telling you this much has made us slightly dizzy.

Miss Johns has an exotic face, with slanting eyes, high cheekbones and a saucy up-turned nose, topped by sandy, reddish hair. She has a semi-deadpan, throw-away style of acting. She manages to command scenes without appearing to do so. She is interesting to watch, and we should like to see her in a more demanding vehicle.

Miss Johns is not a selfish actress, either, for she permits New York's own Patricia Wheel, as the elder sister, to dominate much of the second act, and Polly Rowles, as the imperious movie scout, much of all three stanzas. Albert Dekker, Alan Napier and Robert Duke do well by what's left of the Bagnold opus, under Shumlin's direction.

"Gertie" is at its best in the second act, which contains Miss Bagnold's wittiest and most dramatic writing. It offers a good ten or 15 minutes of suave fun. But that's hardly enough to compensate for some two hours in the playhouse. Our English cousins seem to expect less and get less in their show-shops than do we on this side of the Atlantic.

The New York Times

January 31, 1952

Enid Bagnold's Comedy of Manners, 'Gertie,' Brings Glynis Johns From London to Broadway

By BROOKS ATKINSON

To see Enid Bagnold's "Gertie," which opened at the Plymouth last evening, is to realize again that the British are admirable people. They are solid. They are intelligent, observant and civilized, and they also have a sense of humor. But why is there no bounce or sparkle in this comedy of manners by a woman with an original mind and a shrewd understanding of other women? About a quarter of a century ago she wrote the fabulous novel from which "Serena Blandish" was made. Why isn't "Gertie" equally impudent and amusing?

It is the story of a hardheaded English girl who decides to go to America to make her fortune out of men. Gertie is one of the three children of an impractical literary scientist who lives in the country writing an unsalable book. In another year they will be penniless. Good fortune, and also the author of the comedy, introduce an opulent American film ambassadress and an opportunistic Broadway producer into Gertie's house. Their presence is highly improbable, but they are there; and by using her wits, Gertie gets a toe-hold in America for her sister and herself.

Although that is a pedestrian plot which Hollywood might think three times about, Mrs. Bagnold has a convoluted comic style. She proceeds from point to point sideways, which is funny. Gertie's mental processes are so indirect that a frank statement by her seems almost hilarious. There is a lot of brightness tossing around on the surface of this comedy—observations about the splendor and assurance of visiting Americans, a blunt analysis of the prospects of unmarried English girls, devastating comments on the quality of British manpower today; and there is a highly amusing streak of romantic fantasy in the second act when Gertie and her sister astound the Americans with a tall tale of princely amour in Paris.

But "Gertie" never takes flight for more than a few sequences at a time. For the writing is not consistently unhinged; a good deal of it is sensible, which is disheartening. And Herman Shumlin's direction lacks gaiety.

He has had the good taste to import from England Glynis Johns to play the title role. Miss Johns is quietly humorous in everything she does. Call it interior humor: the chuckle is on the inside. Although she appears to be walking through the part, she is really fantasticating it with a dry relish of Mrs. Bagnold's caprices.

* * *

Polly Rowles is entertainingly brassy and sardonic as the American film errand girl; and Albert Dekker is sufficiently suave, costly and unscrupulous to be an English lady's notion of a smart Broadway producer. As Gertie's literary sister Patricia Wheel gives a neat and discerning performance.

In their design of a comfortable English country house, William and Jean Eckart have been hospitable and relaxing, but they have covered the living room with a paper that is trying on the eyes. After an hour of staring at it, a theatregoer feels giddier than the play. Since "Gertie" has a giddy point of view, the wallpaper comes under the head of unfair competition. Let the author provide all the distractions.

DAILY NEWS

January 31, 1952

'Gertie' an Ineffectual Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Somewhere along the fogged and devious course of "Gertie," which Herman Shumlin presented last evening at the Plymouth Theatre, a hard-headed movie woman from New York finds in London an amateur's playscript, which she admires enough to say of it that it isn't very good but there is something in it.

Well, that is the gist of this review. Anything that follows here is mere detail.

"Gertie," by Enid Bagnold, a novelist, introduces in the title role a dead-panned young lady named Glynis Johns, who, it says in the back of the program, is known to filmgoers. I am happy for her that she is, for last evening was no fair test of her ability to become known to the few frequenters of the New York stage. She plays the part of a matter-of-fact girl in a matter-of-fact way, and I find no reason for becoming either excited or discouraged over her abilities.

Some Uneasy Actors.

But I am discouraged about the acting of everybody else in the cast, with the exception of Polly Rowles. Miss Rowles, as the hard-headed movie woman, knows her craft and manages to evoke some kind of theatrical character. The rest of the company, who include Alan Napier, Patricia Wheel, Albert Dekker and Robert Duke, seem surprised and embarrassed to be discovered on a lighted stage, as if the stage manager had signaled the rise of the curtain before they were quite ready.

Miss Bagnold's comedy does have a point, or an observation, or a literate comment here and there, and somewhere in the second act is a fairly amusing scene in which Miss Johns prompts Miss Wheel into reciting Miss Wheel's amateur playscript. But "Gertie" is the wispiest of pieces for the stage.

Anyhow, the Set's Good.

In it, Miss Johns plays the youngest but most determined member of an English family consisting of a repressed sister (Miss Wheel), an undeveloped brother (Mr. Duke) and a father of the old absent-minded professor type (Mr. Napier). Miss Johns is, in the play, willing to forget about love if she can only get to America—which is no great motivation for an entire play.

William and Jean Eckart's setting, a country house in England, is very good. Either Shumlin's direction is limited by his choice of actors or vice versa.

"Come of Age"

DAILY NEWS

January 24, 1952

Miss Anderson Puts Fire and Life Into Fine Revival of 'Come of Age'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is easy to see why Judith Anderson has been saying in interviews that "Come of Age" is her favorite play, for she is magnificent in it and it gives her a wide range through which to move, showing her feline grace and ferocious temperament.

Miss Anderson first appeared in this play with music by Clemence Dane and Richard Addinsell in 1934. Last night she was in it again at the New York City Center, and it is another excellent production for the public-spirited and artistically-minded New York City Theatre Company.

Oscar Hammerstein once told me that the most recent revival of "Show Boat" was set and costumed in much more brilliant colors than the original because people, as their recollections grow older and fonder, remember things in more brilliant hues; a duplication of the original might be a letdown. I was one of those fortunate enough to see the short-lived "Come of Age" 17 years ago and to think at the time that it was a very fine thing.

Rosy Memories.

Perhaps with these 17 years my fond recollections have become too rosy, for last evening I found that some of "Come of Age" was rather callow and self-conscious, and that Mr. Addinsell's score, which once seemed so modern, now sounded like stuff from a bygone jazz age—which, of course, it is. Nevertheless, I found pleasure in this mystical romance, admiration for Robert Brown's playing of A Boy, and excitement in Miss Anderson's theatrical display.

"Come of Age" is a play in verse—some of it admitted and deliberate doggerel and some of it moving and good—about the poet, Thomas Chatterton, who, hungry for bread and hungry for recognition, committed suicide about 1770. In her drama Miss Dane has wondered how a Chatterton might fare in modern London — so she has arranged for the boy to get a reprieve from Death and a chance to satisfy his hunger in another century.

A Nice Pal Joey.

This boy, this modern Chatterton, is personable, eager, open-souled and talented. He becomes a kind of educated Pal Joey, for he is taken under the tutelage and patronage of a woman of means who is twice his age—Miss Anderson. Death has given him this second chance to come of age—to grow from boyhood to manhood. He will become a man when he loves a woman—but if he ever tells his secret, of his bargain for a return to life, he must give himself back to Death. Death is quite confident that the boy will tell his secret to the first woman he loves, and so he does.

The real talents of the modern Chatterton are as unappreciated as they were in the 18th Century; but he never goes hungry and his lesser talents for making light music and verse find great favor. His protectress feels that she owns him, and when he rebels she makes an enormous scene of rage, frustration and drunkenness at one of her parties. This is where Miss Anderson lets go.

Staged With Affection.

Muriel Rahn and Thomas Motto sing Addinsell's score very pleasantly, although not always understandably when they are singing from offstage in the big theatre. The supporting players are numerous, and the women guests at the cocktail party, handsome and handsomely gowned, include even Ethel Colt in a walk-on part. Melville Ruick plays Miss Anderson's middle-aged patron with ease and assurance. There's a pair of nice sets by Raymond Sovey, Guthrie McClintic has directed the work with obvious affection, and Macklin Morrow conducts the orchestra.

"COME OF AGE"

Play in "words and music", by Clemence Dane, with music by Richard Addinsell; staged by Guthrie McClintic; settings by Raymond Sovey; revived by the New York City Theatre Company (George Schaefer, artistic director) at the New York City Center, January 23, 1952. The cast:

A Boy.....Robert Brown
A Shadow of Death.....Robert Harrison
A Woman.....Judith Anderson
A Man.....Melville Ruick
A Close Friend..Marian Seldes
Friends of the Woman:..... Ethel Colt, Richard Barbee, June Jollie, Lita Dal Porto, Stephen Reese, James Noble, Muriel Rahn, James Bronson, Phoebe Mackaye, Barbara Torrance, Gerry Jedd, Peter Brandon, Jacqueline deWit, Bill Krach.
An Entertainer....Muriel Rahn

Journal American

January 24, 1952

Even Judith Can't Always Make It Click

By JOHN McCLAIN

There are a number of highly complimentary things to be said of "Come of Age," another revival, which was brought to the City Theatre last night by the City Theatre Co. and Guthrie McClintic.

There was a forceful and fluid performance by Judith Anderson, some haunting and effective music by Richard Addinsell, a couple of superior sets by Raymond Sovey and a comprehensive job of direction by McClintic.

I only wish I knew what it was all about.

It seems a young man of 17, living in London a couple of hundred years ago, chooses to commit suicide. While in his last throes, the voice of Death reaches him, bidding him hurry hence. But the young man gives Death an argument, pleading that he should be allowed to live at least until he has come of age.

For some reason Death is stuck for an answer and the fellow is therefore allowed to return to life. They have been arguing so long that by the time he gets back to London it is 1952.

* * *

Meets the Woman

There he meets The Woman, played by Judith Anderson. He is handsome and delicate and ethereal, and he also happens to live in the flat directly above hers. She is a declining butterfly and of course she successfully seduces him and sweeps him into her dizzy world of intrigue and insobriety.

Then comes the day when she tires of him and publicly pushes him in his face. Having by this time known his share of love, jealousy and hate, he has come of age; so when the Grim Reaper pages him once more—he goes quietly.

Those are the meagre essentials of the plot which Clemence Dane has to tell, but in my humble opinion she has chosen the hard way to tell it.

First of all it is written in what she and Mr. Addinsell, her collaborator, describe as a modern equivalent of Elizabethan blank verse, set to off-stage music tailored to the mood and tempo of the scene.

Thus you have the young man at one point saying, "I have a date with death. Won't it be fun for me? Won't it be fun for me?" All this more or less to the beat of the back-stage orchestra.

* * *

Restricts the Story

I simply fail to see the advantages of the verse; I didn't find it sufficiently mellifluous and I think it restricts the telling of the story, if it is really much of a story in the first place. Everything is so oblique you can't be sure.

The music is almost uniformly charming, and I have no quarrel with that, as a form, any more than I would argue that the background music in "The Third Man" wasn't a distinct asset to the picture.

The entire proceedings fall on the shoulders of Miss Anderson and Robert Brown, who plays the young man.

As recorded above, Miss Anderson makes an heroic effort to battle the whole thing through by the sheer strength of her own talents and for brief intervals, such as the cocktail party in the second act, she succeeds.

But I do not believe she is given much assistance either by the vehicle or, I regret, Brown. I found him unhappily lacklustre and irresolute; he would never "come of age," and one wouldn't care much anyway.

When "Come of Age" was first presented in 1934 it was generally rejected by the critics. Since then, however, a legend has grown up around it; it was said the public wasn't ready for it.

As a member of the present public I would say the remark still stands.

The New York Times

January 24, 1952

Judith Anderson Acts Chief Part in 'Come of Age' in the City Center Series

By BROOKS ATKINSON

No one needs to be told now that Judith Anderson is a great actress. But it is gratifying now and then to have a chance to see her quality proved, and "Come of Age," which was brilliantly put on at the City Center last evening, is her occasion. Perhaps she played it as imaginatively in 1934 as she is playing it now. But it is also possible that she did not have then the insight into a part that she has now, nor the abundance of compassion. Isn't this a richer performance than the one she gave originally? At least to one theatregoer, it seems so.

"Come of Age" is a frail and haunting literary artifice by Clemence Dane and Richard Addinsell, set to an exquisite score and written in doggerel. It is a legend about Thomas Chatterton, the wistful eighteenth-century poet, restored to life for a few pleasant years in the twentieth century. He finds in the love of a worldly woman of contemporary London the sweetness, warmth and exultation he missed in the bleak years when he was alive.

As a play it is insubstantial, partly, in this department's opinion, because the doggerel is an inadequate vehicle to carry the loveliness and the melancholy of the fable. Mr. Addinsell's shimmering score is more than adequate: it is decently inspired and parts of it are affectingly sung by Muriel Rahn, Beverly Hosier and Thomas Motto. Although Miss Dane doubtless had a definite purpose in writing the verse as doggerel, the theme needs eloquence in the words as well as the music. The writing is too trivial for a play that is pure evocation of a delicate mood.

In the circumstances, "Come of Age" has to be filled out and animated by the acting. And the acting, in turn, has to be superlative. Probably it would take John Barrymore to play opposite Miss Anderson in the part of the boy. Robert Brown, who plays the part, is a winning young man with qualities that are appealing. But he does not get very deep into the character. His love scenes are pallid. When, especially in the last act, "Come of Age" plunges into an emotional scene, Mr. Brown is beyond his depth.

Perhaps it would be wiser to regard "Come of Age" as an original and sensitively wrought literary conceit that is ideal for Miss Anderson's talents. For that is the way it has come off in the theatre. Using James Reynolds' original designs, Raymond Sovey has given the production wide, soft and imposing scenery that is lighted with taste. And Guthrie McClintic has directed an enchanting performance. Without being busy, it has life. The music and the acting are orchestrated. The big scene in the second act is expressive and imposing.

When Miss Anderson is offstage, the magic of "Come of Age" stops. Fortunately, she is on-stage most of the time, and acting. And the character she plays covers a full range of womanly experience from hard-headed coquetry in the first act to humiliation and anguish at the end.

Like a born actress, Miss Anderson draws character in her walk, in her attitudes, in her gestures and glances as well as in the lines the author has given her. The character is full of passion—some of it sensual, some of it cruel, some of it importunate and pleading. But all of it is the womanliness of a strong character that is lucky enough to be acted by a genuine artist. Miss Anderson brings "Come of Age" alive by being so vital, skillful and imaginative as an actress.

Daily Mirror

January 24, 1952

'Come of Age' Revived At City Center

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Back in 1934 Delos Chappell presented "Come of Age" at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. It ran for a mere 35 performances. Since then, ironically, it has become one of the most widely discussed and, in some quarters, beloved of contemporary plays. Inspired by the brief life and failure of Thomas Chatterton, its very failure has, over the years, been turned into succes d'estime.

Chatterton won fame with verses which he attributed to one Thomas Rowley. When the deception was uncovered, those who had praised the young poet now reviled him. So he took poison at the age of 17. In their play with music, Clemence Dane and Richard Addinsell have Chatterton cheating death through a trick. He returns in the present as the clever author of popular songs and revue material.

He comes under the influence of a possessive, willful, aging woman who furthers his career. But when he doesn't come running at her call, she humiliates and crushes him. He then reveals his secret, and is again claimed by death. This poetic musical fantasy requires, we think, an intimate theatre, for it is a brittle, sensitive tour-de-force.

"Come of Age was revived by the New York City Theatre Company in the huge City Center last evening. Raymond Sovey has expanded James Reynolds' original scenic designs, and Guthrie McClintic has broadened the direction to suit the large stage. Values are lost in the transformation.

Judith Anderson once more plays the Woman. Miss Anderson is one of the great actresses of our time, but she lacks discipline.

She has terrific power and vitality, which, in our opinion, she is inclined to misuse. Her initial entrance last night was startling. She strode across the stage with undulating movements that were arresting and disturbing.

Her drunken scene in the second act was realistic and commanding, though hardly notable for subtlety. She was at her best in the final, tragic act. This she brought off with restraint, resource and triumphant emotional impact.

Robert Brown, as the Boy, seemed rather negative against Miss Anderson's dynamic acting. He was somewhat stolid in his movements, and his voice was hardly up to the demands of the verse. Muriel Rahn, as an entertainer, won a rousing reception for her singing of the Addinsell score.

Macklin Marrow's orchestra and assisting soloists were excellent, though there were times when they intruded upon the onstage speech. It was often difficult to hear the actors' voices over the background music.

"Come of Age" has become a modern classic, despite its sometimes pedestrian rhyming, and the New York City Theatre Company is to be complimented for reviving it at popular prices. If it might appear to better advantage in a smaller house, one must take it as it is and be thankful. For no other producer has had the courage to restage it.

New York Herald Tribune

January 24, 1952

'Come of Age'

By WALTER F. KERR

I AM afraid that City Center has given Judith Anderson an elaborate opportunity to make the same mistake twice. "Come of Age," the Clemence Dane-Richard Addinsell fantasy with which Miss Anderson had no success eighteen years ago, was exhumed at the municipal playhouse Wednesday night, and should prove an object lesson to us all.

It is a theatrical truth that there never is a failure so witless, so pretentious, so exasperatingly dull that it does not attract a handful of passionate admirers who cheer at its opening, weep at its closing, and stoutly maintain that "There is an audience for this play." The scenery has no sooner gone to the warehouse than this eager little band institutes a whispering campaign to the effect that a beautiful thing has been killed, and a turkey is on its way to being canonized. No doubt this is all normal enough, and provides some innocent consolation for the author.

* * *

What is not normal is for any one to take this minority seriously enough to put the play back on the stage. But this is precisely what the people at City Center have done. They haven't been stingy about it, either. Valentina has draped Miss Anderson in some dazzling gowns, Noel Taylor has dressed the other people for beautifully muted contrast, Raymond Sovey has executed a striking ivory and gold formal setting, and Guthrie McClintic has been called in to stage the play with thoroughly professional elegance.

But we are still confronted with that play, and it is a little horror. The authors first introduce us to the seventeen-year-old poet, Thomas Chatterton, at the moment of his suicide in 1770. He is summoned from his couch by the offstage voice of Death, and told that he has never come of age. He never can come of age, it develops, until he has "shared his secret" with a woman—at seventeen he has apparently had little opportunity to do this—and he is forthwith transported to the present time and the fashionable apartment of a high-living, hard-drinking woman of the world. By the time he has felt her jealousy, her rage, and her rather frosty compassion, he has presumably grown up a bit and is ready to die, which he does.

If you have heard any of the interim mooning about the play, you are prepared for the fact that it is written in rhymed couplets. But nothing can really prepare you for the numbing effect of an entire evening spent listening to choppy, cryptic, and endlessly repetitious little forays like the